KATE CAREW FINDS A MATINEE IDOL ROBBED OF HIS VOTARIES

That Is to Say, if the Young Girls of Paris Had Any Chance to Gather Pictures of Actors and Hang Around Stage Doors and Get Into Clandestine Correspondences, M. Le Bargy Would Doubtless Be the Object of Their Tender Care.

This Middle Aged "Greek God," Who Leads Even Paris in Matters Sartorial and Whose Figure Looms Large on the French Stage, Takes the Bit in His Teeth When Confronted by the Interviewer and Interviews Himself at a Gallop.

BY KATE CAREW.

Paris, March 8.

WHEN is a Matinee Idol not a Matinee Idol?

You don't know?

Why, when he is born and bred in Paris, of course.

It's very hard on him. He may have all the hallmarks of the Matinee Idol. He may be tall and svelte, with large, lustrous eyes and the features of a Greek god, and many a young girl may worship him in secret, but he never sees any outward evidence of this. He never gets any "mash notes" written with Florentine frenzy nor the burning requests for autographs which are the natural perquisites of the Matinee Idol elsewhere. Nor does he stroll out of the stage door dressed in beautiful off-the-stage clothes, to find lines of palpitating girlhood waiting just to gaze adoringly at him.

You see, the Young Person in Paris can't do these things, at least not if she is bien elevée—which means well brought up, in case you've forgotten for the moment. Poor thing, she would be sent off to a convent or shut up in an asylum at once by scandalized relatives if she stood at a stage door, and if she tried to get into correspondence with a handsome actor she'd cause about as much consternation in her circle.

LE BARGY COMES CLOSEST.

Now, the nearest approach to a Matinee Idol in Paris is Le Bargy.

He is really Charles Gustave Auguste as well, but no one gives him credit for all these showy front names. He is just Le Bargy to his public.

In appearance he is the ideal Broadway M. I., Greek god effect and all, though he is getting a little heavy with years. As for clothes, well, Paris is the last word in garments, and Le Bargy leads her by the nose, as it were. The gilded youth wait with bated breath for his edict as to ties and the latest cut of his morning coat, and tales are recounted of the magnitude of his wardrobe which are like those related of Queen Elizabeth or Beau Brummel or any other dressy back numbers.

In spite of this, the beautiful youth of him was spent in acting leading juveniles, with never any encouragement from the very well brought up girls of his native land and never a burning glance from the shadows of the stage door.

THE BEST OF AUTHORITY.

Now you're wondering how I know all this.

It's quite simple. He told me about it himself, and if ever you want to set yourself a little brain exercise, just you try explaining what a Matinee Idol is to an actor who has never plied his trade outside of France.

If he was a bit slow on the M. I. guessing game, however, it's all he was slow about. I never met such an electric lightning change personality in all my varied young life. "Teddy" Roosevelt is a lotus eater beside him and Whitman a district messenger boy. You can almost hear him crackle and shoot forth blue sparks like a trolley wire in a rainstorm.

Jumpy! Why, I was jumpy for two hours after conversing with him for fifteen minutes, and I never expect to be able to tell you what he said when he let himself go, because it was like hearing and seeing three rings and a stage all going full swing at the circus.

A SUBJECT UNDER THE BAN.

The Godfather of the interview was rather nervous about it, anyhow.

"Whatever you do," he said to me in a stage whisper just before the Great Actor came, "don't ask him anything about the Comédie Française. He has only consented to give you this interview because he thinks that, being an American, you won't bother him about that matter."

Oh, these solar plexus blows!

Of course I wanted to ask him about the Comédie Française and the punishment in the shape of a heavy fine which is to be meted out to him for running away from his duties there and acting at another Paris theatre not a mile away, when he knows that the municipality forbids it. And I wanted to question him as to why he got peeved with the Comédie in the first place, but, alas! I was on me honor, and the golden moment passed, so I shall never hear the truth from his own lips.

All I could do under these distressing circumstances was to give a little gasp of dismay and fumble for my notes so as to scratch out "Comédie Française," which was there in big letters.

AH! HERE HE IS.

He was coming. I could hear a hasty footstep and the Godfather's face changed as he gave a warning nod.

Then in dashed Le Bargy. He flung the door open and took three long strides across the room, hat on head, cigarette in mouth and coat tails flapping briskly around him.

He stopped in front of me with a dramatic gesture, as if he were Marc Antony addressing a crowd.

"Well, what can I do for you?" he jerked out. "You want to interview me, I understand. What do you want to know? What do you want me to say? I am horribly fatigued and very busy. Can't possibly give you much time. How can we manage it, eh?"

Maybe you think this was encouraging to a shrinking soul.

And the rate these words came out all in a heap!

"I've always thought French people spoke too rapidly. Now I realize that I knew something about it; that they've invariably tempered the wind to the shorn lamb heretofore. This was the real thing.

CONFISCATED HER MANUSCRIPT.

"I—I have a few questions," I stammered, searching for that paper where I jotted down something to help me in an emergency.

His ear caught the rustle and he stretched out a hand for the paper. I didn't want to give it to him, but he has a hand that must be obeyed. It is a large, white, well formed member, with a certain firmness about it, and you have a feeling that if it is denied it might make things unpleasant.

He settled a pair of glasses on his nose and glanced at the scrawl.

"I think I'll just read these over and send you the answers," he announced, "'twill save time, 'twill save time."

I sank nervously on an uncomfortable stool and the Godfather of the interview, with one beaming glance at me, as if to assure me that all was going as well as could be expected, left the room.

The actor man paced rapidly up and down like one in training, and as he walked he read aloud and made clicking noises with his lips. "Tchu, tchu," and muttered "Tiens, tiens, tiens," at quick intervals, as if letting off steam."

I surveyed him furtively. Hat still on his head and just a mere suspicion to the side, clothes simply perfection.

An elephant-gray morning coat suit, a black tie knotted with greatest care and garnished with a chaste pearl pin, shoes of patent leather with gray uppers and gray gloves of the same shade.

Oh, if he had only been as restful as his clothes!

He has lost a little of his sveltness, but he is still exceedingly well set up and holds himself like a sportsman. He has a girlishly fair skin, curling gray hair, very handsome features and mild blue eyes. But if his eyes are mild, his mouth is not. It turns up a little at the side in a slightly sardonic way, and it is thin lipped and rather severe.

It belongs to a Roman statesman, that mouth, and is quite out of place with those gentle orbs above it.

A MOMENT OF GREAT RELIEF.

I really was enormously relieved at the idea that he would write out the answers to the questions. It's such an easy way of earning your salary to have some one volunteer to do the work, and I was just beginning to congratulate myself and regain my poise when he suddenly stopped his walking race with himself and fired a few more hasty words at me.

"I think I'll answer them now," he said crisply, and collapsed into a chair, removing the end of the cigarette from his mouth and still waving the paper.

"Wouldn't you prefer sending them to me? It may be difficult to"—

I don't know what I was going to say, for I was unable to finish the sentence even in my mind.

"Difficult?" he interrupted. "But not at all. I can get through these in a quarter of an hour."

Then he began.

AS TO MATINEE IDOLS.

"I don't understand this first one," he mumbled, as he read it over. "We'll skip that."

"Oh, please," I cried in consternation. "Please don't skip that. I'll explain it to you."

It was about Matinee Idols in Paris, and of course he hadn't gathered what I meant at all, for there is no adequate expression for it in this language, and, though I had done the best I could on paper, I hadn't come within miles of it.

I took my courage in my hands at this point and labored with him.

I explained our Young Person to him. I pointed out what a factor she is in the theatre and how she goes to matinees without Mommer or Popper, and can shower girlish attentions upon the Idol without any one taking it seriously. I had to get it all out at express speed, but, I flatter myself, he was interested.

IT IS OUT OF THE QUESTION.

Anyway, he spoke a trifle more slowly when he answered, and gave me a chance to realize what a beautiful voice he has, when he isn't rushing it.

"That sort of thing couldn't exist here," he informed me, not without a certain superiority. "You understand that the young girl in France has very little freedom and she is naturally conventional in consequence. It would not occur to her to express her admiration in any such manner."

"Doesn't she even write just a harmless little note to tell her favorite actor what a wonderful Romeo or Hamlet or Hernani he is?"

"Well, that has been done," he admitted, "but the incident would close there, and it would be most exceptional, anyhow. The conditions are absolutely different. The French actor, no matter how much his art is appreciated, is never a—what did you name it?—a Matinees Idol."

"Would he like to be?"

He smiled in a chilly sort of way and went on talking.

"A French girl, however, sometimes conceives romantic attachments for her teachers and masters, but these are very harmless."

"Oh, well, so is our Matinee Idol worship," I assured him.

He had looked a trifle reminiscent as he spoke of romantic attachments to teachers and masters, and I wondered if he was recalling the time when he was a handsome young teacher at the Conservatoire and Mme. Simone was a gawky young girl pupil, who gazed at him with adoration, until at last he made inquiries about

HE SETTLED A PAIR OF GLASSES ON HIS NOSE AND GLANCED AT THE SCRAWL.

HE STOPPED IN FRONT OF ME WITH A DRAMATIC GESTURE.

her, married her—and the rest you know.

He didn't wear that look over the fraction of a second. He gave the glasses on his nose a settling touch and turned to the questions again.

"Did I go on the stage when I was very young?" he gabbled in a machine made voice.

"Yes, I did. I was just twenty."

"Were my parents in sympathy?"

"Oh, they were quite indifferent."

HE NIPPED IT IN THE BUD.

Now, I've no doubt that there is an interesting story back of that statement, and I opened my mouth to force a query upon him, but, bless your heart, he didn't give me a chance to get a word in edgeways. He simply took a header on to the next question.

It amused him; he laughed outright.

"Am I nervous on first nights? Ma foi! I should think I am!"

"How does it affect you," I gibbered, so afraid he would dash away from that with a bare statement.

"Oh, the usual symptoms; a sort of mental and physical paralysis. My knees quake, my heart beats a double measure, can't see anything on the stage at first. Horrible! and I never get over it; same thing every time I play a new part!" He gave his head a despondent little shake.

But that was enough said. He dismissed the subject and mumbled the next as if he were learning a lesson.

A QUERY IN THE ASH HEAP.

"Do you think the French stage deteriorating at the moment? Umm; shan't answer that question. It's absurd. Anyway, it would be an article in itself."

"Oh, can't you just spare a moment to say something about it?" I pleaded, falling quite into line with his speed, but absolutely spent and breathless from the effort.

He shook his head and merely said, "Tchu."

Then he flicked the ash from his cigarette stump with his firm white fingers and took up the paper again.

"Do you mind being called the Beau Brummel of the French stage?"

He straightened his glasses a little consciously.

"Of course I don't," he murmured impatiently, not looking at me, but out of the window.

SELFISH WITH HIS GLANCES.

And I'd like to remark at this point, though you mustn't think I'm piqued about it, that he never did look at me through the whole slap-dash interview. He fixed his baby blue eyes on the wall, the chair, his cigarette or even his shoes, but he never cast a glance at me, and I dare say he couldn't tell you whether I was black or white. I merely say this to show you how little training he has had as a Matinee Idol. It is not all the treatment one receives in Playhouses on Broadway.

"I'm flattered if they really call me the Beau Brummel," he continued, with a sarcastic lift of lip.

"Well, they really do," I nipped in, spiritedly.

He gave a little nod and closed the chapter.

The next question was, "Don't you think that French artists act with more reserve now than they did formerly?"

"Tiens, tiens!" he grumbled. "What an idea! Am I to write a book or some pages of a magazine? These are subjects to be discussed at length."

"Parkis is willin'," said I, in English, because I didn't know how to say it in French—"Parkis est complaisant" doesn't sound right, somehow.

A CONDENSED EXPLANATION.

Anyway, he didn't care; he decided for himself that he had a few moments in which to say something about the French stage, so he rattled off a few parts of speech.

"Of course, we play with more reserve nowadays," he declared. "Plays of the present demand it. The drama of Victor Hugo as interpreted by Mounet-Sully called for broad gestures, much declamation, big effects to thrill an audience. Now the style of drama has quite changed, and we actors creep on the stage and get our best effects by reserve and tenseness. The basis is different; naturally the art of acting moves in accord with it. The same thing is true everywhere—not only in France."

I nearly said, "Thank you for them kind words," for he had been so almost lengthy and leisurely during this speech, but I am bound to add I believe he regarded it as a weakness, for he sort of straightened up and shook himself and glared at the ceiling for an instant before he tackled the paper again.

DIDN'T MAKE A HIT WITH HIM.

He looked puzzled as he ran his eye over the next question.

"What do you mean by this?" he inquired quickly. "You ask me whom I consider the most able producer among the playwrights of to-day. Is there any sense in that?"

"Yes," I responded sweetly, though I was rather nettled. "What I mean is, which of the playwrights of Paris do you think the most helpful and efficient in directing the rehearsals of their own pieces."

He directed a severe look at the toe of my new Paris shoe, and he pursed up his lips in disapproval. I guess he considered not answering this, either; then his natural, though hasty, kindness of heart came to my assistance.

He took a puff of the cigarette, and how he did it I don't know, because it had reached that stage where you could only hold it by sticking a hairpin through it.

Yes, of course, I know these things. Haven't I been living over here some months?

Well, he took the puff, as I say; then he answered the question.

ROSTAND AND BATAILLE.

"Rostand is quite invaluable at rehearsals," he said generously, "and Bataille, too, gives the actor many helpful suggestions. There are other playwrights in Paris who are excellent in this, and there are still others who ought to be forcibly kept away from the theatre. But on the whole I think I should say that Rostand and Bataille are the best."

He is a canny Actor Man all right, for he happens to be playing the leading part in a Bataille piece now, and next month he is to try Rostand's Cyrano.

The next question fretted him quite a little.

"Do I study types and the characteristics of people to aid me in my parts? Now what do you mean by that?"

"You must remember those are only hasty notes you have there," I said. "They were just meant to help me out."

SHOWING HIM HIS PLACE.

I wanted to show him that after all he had rather taken possession of this interview and not given me a fair chance, and I think it put him in his place as the interviewer a bit; at any rate he replied apparently for his own edification, since he only muttered the words.

"Of course, I study people to a certain extent. The actor is like the painter or the writer; he must mirror life in his art. He must get the human note, whether he is playing in classic tragedy or modern comedy."

"That's true," I remarked with interest, and I was about to chat a little on the subject, for my spirit is not easily broken, but he quelled my youthful ardor by turning again to that paper, which I began to wish I had consigned to the flames of the salamander in my bedroom. He read out the next question, and I felt myself turn pale, for it was a hackneyed one; the only thing you can say for it being that Thespians never tire of having you ask it and always have an answer of their own for it.

MUST HAVE THE SPIRIT OF IT.

"Um-um-m! Alors" mumbled Le Bargy, with almost human interest, and taking it quite like a lamb. "Does an actor have to feel what he portrays? He does not absolutely have to feel it at every performance, but I think he must have felt it once, at any rate, to get the spirit of it. The actor who felt it each time and did not exhaust himself by the strength of so much emotion would be fortunate, indeed. I believe the true actor must have experienced many things to be able to enter into many parts."

He hesitated, as if to be sure that I followed him, and I reassured him with a timid, "I understand what you mean."

"Bon!" he ejaculated crisply.

"But I do want to ask you something myself!" I cried in desperation. "I never really meant to use all those things on the paper. They were just suggestions," for I saw him chucking down the questions and escaping in another moment or two.

"Well?" he inquired.

WHIPPED UP HER COURAGE.

"What part do you feel most of all those which you have played, and which do you like best?"

Really, my dears, I never panted through a speech so rapidly in my life. I saw nervous breakdown staring me in the face, but I stuck to the race and got to the winning post in time to merit his approval. At any rate, he answered me.

"I don't know what part I like best or feel most," he said, genially. "The last one is always the most interesting, and I am most fond of it. With every new role the others are dismissed from my mind."

"Then the professor in 'Les Flambeaux' is possessing you at present?"

"Yes, absolutely. I think it is a very great part."

"Have you ever written a play yourself?" I ventured, feeling that I was gaining his confidence and gathering strength for the breakneck pace.

"Jamais de la vie!" he exclaimed emphatically, and that, oh, children, is as one would say, "Not on your life."

A penetrating query like that startled him, and he thought he had better quell further Sherlock Holmesing on my part, so he insisted upon reading from the paper again.

"What changes would you make if you were manager of a theatre?" he declaimed. "A-ha, again you ask something that's a history. I shall skip that."

And he did.

"Do French actors use too much make-up?" was the next one that caught him. He almost looked at me by mistake, and his orbs glittered a bit behind the glasses.

SHOWS THE REAL LE BARGY.

"I think they do. Personally, I prefer to play my parts with as little make-up as possible. I feel nearer to my audience without a haze of grease paint and powder between us, yet, of course, in certain characters one must alter the features as far as possible to make them consistent with the type of man portrayed. When this is not necessary then I believe it far better to dispense with all but the very smallest amount of color, etc., that the footlights demand."

There was nothing left on the paper but the half erased query as to the Comédie Française, which he pretended wasn't there at all, though, of course, he must have read it through the pencil scratchings, and he was under the impression he had finished, so he stamped on the end of the cigarette and rose.

I must say he looked exceedingly handsome as he towered above me. A distinguished middle-aged man, with an intelligent face, a noble head, and, as I have remarked before, exceedingly chic clothes.

I couldn't take him by the tail of his morning coat and say "Tarry a moment, gentle stranger," but I wasn't through with him yet, though my head was whirling and I had that dryness in my throat which comes when you have been running like mad.

"Oh, Monsieur Le Bargy," I cried, breathlessly. "One moment. Please tell me a little more about yourself. What are your recreations, for instance?"

He took three stage strides to the door and turned the handle, then paused as the hero generally does, for a last word.

"I amuse myself well," he replied, airily. "I walk, I travel a good deal, I read fine books, I smoke excellent cigars, I eat good dinners and like pretty women. Me voila!"

"Would you be sorry to leave the stage?"

A PARTING PARTHIAN SHOT.

"But not at all; I should be charmed to leave the stage to-morrow, and certainly when my time comes to retire I shall be greatly pleased. I prefer la joie de vivre to la joie de théâtre. Au revoir, Mademoiselle."

And he whisked out of the door.

I am almost sure he ran up the corridor. I didn't go out to look, because I was afraid he would turn around and catch me at it, which would have been embarrassing.

No, I just picked up the paper and fanned myself with it to cool off after my athletic efforts.

In came the Godfather of the interview; he tiptoed through the door, wearing the anxious expression of a harassed mother hen.

"Did it go well?" he questioned.

"Oh, yes, decidedly," I responded stanchly, "both well and quickly."

"He is always so kind," he remarked.

"Umm, umm," I acquiesced, and I am sure he is; but he is certainly a trifle hurried in his good deeds.

As I say, I was distinctly jumpy after my talk with what might have been a Matinee Idol under other circumstances, in other climes.

He may have had another engagement. He may have been worried and felt he was wasting the gladsome moments when he might have been studying Cyrano or choosing new clothes, or most anything you like, I don't know, I'm sure. But one thing I have gleaned is this: that though we Americans are fairly rapid about handing out conversation, we're heavy old traction engines compared to the agile Frenchman on the talking path!

The sequel to this sad story is that a few nights afterward the Godfather of the interview persuaded me to go and see Le Bargy as the old Professor in "Les Flambeaux."

A REVELATION TO HER.

He had a hard time doing it, for at first I refused. One of those up and down and all around refusals, but he prevailed upon me, assured me I wouldn't suffer the slightest inconvenience from any undue haste in speech on or in Le Bargy's part, so wearing a haggard look and a heavy heart I went.

And lo and behold, what he said was true!

There was that electric dynamo of a man playing a part which required the weight and repose of years, the deliberate speech, the thoughtful utterance.

He had it all and with no effort whatever.

That's my idea of real acting, but oh, why doesn't he mingle the stage more with real life?

Why, when he knew from the very first moment that I wasn't French, should he have talked like the latest thing in Edison inventions?

These are among the things I never shall know and never can understand.

"I'M FLATTERED IF THEY REALLY CALL ME THE BEAU BRUMMEL."